

REMARKS

This amendment is offered in response to the Office Action of December 13, 1999.

At the outset, the Applicant expresses his appreciation for the courtesy and helpfulness shown by the Examiner in the interview of February 15, 2000 and the subsequent telephone conversation of February 17, 2000.

In response to the first numbered paragraph of the Office Action, the Applicant has removed the primed numerals from the specification and drawings (except for 16') and has used the unprimed numerals for corresponding elements in both strap retainers. No new matter has been added. Formal drawings will be provided after Notice of Allowance.

In response to the second numbered paragraph of the Office Action, the Applicant has amended the specification to give the serial number and filing date of the pending patent application (which, indeed, the examiner found and used as a basis for a double patenting rejection).

In response to the third numbered paragraph of the Office Action, the term "releasably engaging" has been removed from the language cited by the Examiner, and clarified as --attached to--.

In response to the fourth numbered paragraph of the Office Action, the suggested correction was made.

In response to the fifth numbered paragraph of the Office Action, the various cited phrases have been amended to resolve the rejection under 35 U.S.C. §112, second paragraph.

The response to the third numbered paragraph of the Office Action obviates the seventh numbered paragraph of the Office Action.

In response to the eight and ninth numbered paragraphs of the Office Action, the Applicant respectfully traverses the double patenting rejection and respectfully refers the Examiner to MPEP 804, and respectfully submits that either the present invention or the invention of U.S. patent application serial no. 09/410,539 could be practiced without infringing the claims the other and that the double patenting rejection should therefore be withdrawn.

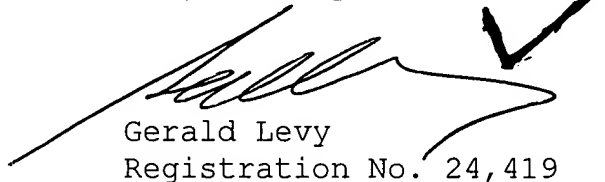
In response to the tenth and eleventh numbered paragraphs of the Office Action, the Applicant respectfully submits that the newly amended claims recite that the first and second strap retainer assemblies are "affixedly secured" (as agreed to in the telephone conversation of February 17, 2000) to the first and fourth ends, respectively, in both the open and closed positions

of the strap retainers. This is quite different from the cited prior art (the Wood reference 'U.S. Patent No. 5,263,726' in view of the Frano reference 'U.S. Patent No. 5,669,118') wherein the strap retainers, in the open position, are prone to slip off of the ends of the straps.

It is therefore respectfully submitted that the presently pending claims are patentable over the cited references.

For all of the reasons above, it is respectfully submitted that all of the presently pending claims are in immediate condition for allowance. The Examiner is respectfully requested to withdraw his rejections of the claims, to allow the claims, and to pass this application to early issue.

Respectfully submitted,



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